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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000329

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION PLOWS AHEAD

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The reconstituted Anti-Corruption Commission is off to a quick start. It summoned 50 individuals to its office to declare their wealth, threatened arrest if declarations were found to be false, arrested seven individuals even after they made their declarations, and announced plans to confiscate property for 15 individuals who did not make declarations. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 22, LTG (R) Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury was appointed Chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and former district judge Abul Hasan Manzur Mannan and ex-member of the National Board of Revenue M. Habibur Rahman were named as commissioners. Public reaction was generally positive with many noting the careful selection of a jurist, a financier, and a retired general.

¶3. (SBU) On February 18, the ACC had released a list of 50 individuals who, along with 21 persons already in jail, received a summons to declare their assets to the Commission within 72 hours or risk confiscation of their assets. The ACC announced that the list, composed mostly of politicians from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League, was developed pursuant to the Emergency Powers Rules ¶2007.

¶4. (SBU) By February 26, 33 individuals had reportedly complied with the order, while an estimated seven others, including former BNP Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, AL's Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, former power secretary A.N.H. Akter Hossain, and BNP Ward Commissioner

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Abdul Quayyum, were arrested shortly after filing their declarations. A number of people successfully sent their wives or advocates to file their declarations, although a representative of Haris Chowdhury, thought to be in hiding, attempted to file a declaration but was refused with the explanation that Haris must file his declaration in person.

¶5. (SBU) The ACC reportedly plans to confiscate property of 15 people for failing to submit the requested declarations. An ACC Commissioner told the press that under the law, "property can be confiscated subject to the approval by magistrates." Among the named are Giasuddin Al-Mamun, BNP's Haris Chowdhury, AL leader Abul Hasnat Abdullah, former AL MPs Shamim Osman, Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, Haji Selim, Bashundara Group chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan (Shah Alam), and former National Board of Revenue member Jahurul Haque.

¶6. (SBU) Asked why widely reputed corrupt persons like Tarique Rahman, locally described as "big fish," were not on this list of 50, Law and Order Advisory Council member

Barrister Mainul told the press that, "We're exercising utmost caution in going after the top corrupt people who have yet to be captured." In reply to the same question, ACC Chairman Chowdhury said, "It would be wrong to think that he is not under our consideration...no one should think they would not be considered." In response to a question about additional arrests, Chowdhury said, "A list of 50 is not a big deal. In a country of 140 million people, this will reach a thousand."

17. (C) Comment: Chowdhury was one of the four advisers of the Iajuddin Ahmed caretaker government who resigned to protest the government's lack of effort to broker a political compromise in anticipation of the elections scheduled for January 22. He has told reporters that this time he will not resign but will fight to achieve his objectives. While his selection represents another instance of the army's placing one of its own at the top of a key government organization, his solid reputation for probity has prompted a positive reaction from Transparency International Bangladesh and many others. As Acting Foreign Affairs Advisor Hossain noted to us, the previous ACC "was not meant to be effective, but this current ACC is meant to correct this." Time will tell, but the new ACC is off to a vigorous start.
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